The Library of the Royal Society of Physicians in Budapest becomes today's Semmelweis Medical History Library

Katalin Kapronczay, PhD; László András Magyar, UnivD; Constance E. Putnam, PhD

See end of article for authors' affiliations.

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Objectives: The 170-year history of the library of the Royal Society of Medicine in Budapest illustrates both that political and cultural context matter and that ''medical'' libraries, if they survive, in due course become primarily ''medical history'' libraries.

Methods: Two of the authors are on the staff of the Semmelweis Medical History Library; the third is a US scholar who makes frequent use of the library. Together, they avail themselves of archival and published materials—and personal experience with the collection—to establish the context that produced the original library, trace its evolution, and describe its present-day incarnation.

Results: A tale of transformation emerges that reflects how collections are likely to change. The authors present events and individuals in the life of the Royal Society's library and paint a picture of the value of today's Semmelweis Medical History Library. Unique treasures in the collection are described.

Conclusion: The story told here is of how a particular nineteenth-century library became a twenty-first–century institution. The authors establish its peculiarly Hungarian context and potential value to librarians and historians from outside Hungary. The overall message is that general medical libraries everywhere are perforce likely to become medical historical libraries over time.

PREFACE

How the Library of the Royal Society of Physicians in Budapest became today's Semmelweis Medical History Library is a tale of the shift in focus characteristic of the way medical libraries, containing books and journals of contemporary interest and importance to practicing physicians and medical researchers, become medical history libraries over time. This particular library's story (available previously only in brief and in Hungarian [1]) is one of just such a transformation and shows what important roles politics, economics, and cultural history can play in whether library materials are preserved and made available to scholars. This account illustrates how establishing and maintaining a library of general medical and (later) medical historical interest requires dedication and generosity on the part of individuals who value medical literature and determine to save it. Many lessons from this case are applicable wherever collections are threatened. Furthermore, the Semmelweis Medical History Library has treasures that medical librarians and scholars elsewhere know too little about: The ''Collection of Rarities'' comprises more than one thousand volumes, among them incunabula and extremely rare manuscripts in Latin and German, numerous sixteenth-century books, and—beyond medicine and pharmacy—rare books in general history, history of science, natural science, anthropology, and so on. More than three dozen languages are represented.

Highlights

- Context matters. The historical background of a library helps determine its functions and its future; shifts in modes of publishing affect and monetary concerns shape the development and preservation of an historical collection.
- Libraries evolve. Medical libraries undergo a normal and profoundly useful transformation over time into repositories of medical history.
- Books alone do not a library make: Libraries can and should be settings for continuing education, cultural affirmation, and assistance to scholars by preserving and making available for use a variety of sometimes rare archival and published materials.

Implications

- Knowing the political and cultural background of a library is essential to understanding its history as well as its present-day status.
- Preserving and expanding historical collections demands vigilance and creative management, especially under difficult fiscal and political circumstances. The loyal and diligent work of Hungarians and others who helped build and preserve this library can serve as a model for other threatened collections.
- Sharing the story of a relatively unknown library's development brings its general assets and unique resources to the attention of a wider audience of librarians and scholars. Few outside Hungary have previously had any way of knowing about the Semmelweis Medical History Library's rich holdings.

HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

Despite being part of the Habsburg Empire, Hungary was in the first half of the nineteenth century a

country with an independent constitution and parliament and its own laws and administration. The Habsburg rulers, in something of a political anomaly, administered Hungary not as Austrian emperors, but as Hungarian kings, and they had surprisingly limited political power. Financial difficulties (caused by the economic crisis following the Napoleonic wars and their own miscalculations) forced the Habsburgs to convoke the Hungarian parliament twice—after an interruption of six decades. Buoyed by this presumed sign of weakness on the part of the Habsburgs, the Hungarians set out in the so-called reform parliaments (1830–1848) to modernize the kingdom. The spirit of liberalism and nationalism in this period became the driving force behind every action.

Hungary prior to the generalized explosion of revolutionary activity across Europe during the 1830s and 1840s was frankly a backward, multinational, feudal, agrarian state, with an insignificant industrial base. Only about 40% of the country's inhabitants were ethnic Hungarians (Magyars). The population as a whole was multicultural in the extreme. Communities of Germans and Jews were prevalent; Slovaks, Russians, Huculs (Ukrainian highlanders), Romanians, Croats, and Serbs were dispersed throughout the Kingdom of Hungary; and there were scattered Gypsy and Armenian enclaves. What tied these groups (loosely) together were a common history, the existence of a common kingdom since the eleventh century, and the retention (up to 1844) of Latin as the official language.

With an eye on their economic and political interests, members of the bourgeoisie (mostly native German) joined the Hungarian fight for freedom and independence in rapidly growing numbers.* Interest in modernizing and expanding the Hungarian language was at a fever pitch. (One writer in 1848 bluntly observed that ''The German language and culture are a threat to our nation'' [2].) Particularly among the educated elite, there was a great upsurge in the ''Magyarization'' of German names, and anything that qualified as Hungarian culture found new support. A popular form of indirectly fighting for freedom from Austria was to establish organizations without waiting for the technically required Habsburg authorization. Among those founded were the *Magyar Tudományos Akadémia* (Hungarian Academy of Science) in 1825 and the *Magyar Tudós Társaság* (Hungarian Society of Scientists) in 1831.

From the 1830s on, the old medieval capital of the country, Buda-Pest, developed at a rate worthy of westward expansion in the United States. In particular, the cosmopolitan Hungarian-German-Jewish commercial town of Pest—on the east side of the Danube, across from Buda—played an increasingly important role in the cultural and economic life of the nation. During the period from 1830 to 1848, the city was also newly enriched by civic institutions, such as German and Hungarian theaters, a concert hall, hotels, baths, and elegant shops. An imposing line of buildings fronted on the Danube, and a handsome new stone bridge (designed by the English engineer, Adam Clark) linked Pest and Buda, adding to the impression that this was now a city worthy of its status as a capital. Factories were built, and journals, magazines, newspapers, editorial houses, and new secondary schools were founded (a university had existed since 1777). Coffeehouses, private salons, and clubs nurtured a lively literary, cultural, and social life.

A large number of well-to-do citizens kept more and more intellectuals (including the medical elite) busy. Even so, in 1858, there were only 197 doctors in Pest and 21 in Buda [3]. Importantly, liberal theories and thoughts proved popular among the medical men. Typically well traveled, they were also better educated than most, widely respected, and economically independent. No wonder, then, that physicians were behind one of the newly established societies, the *Societas Medicorum Pestiensium et Budensium* (Royal Society of Physicians in Budapest).†

THE FOUNDING ERA (1837–1870)

The society was founded by sixteen physicians—medical doctors with university degrees (not mere surgeons, who had less education and belonged to a lower social class)—in 1837, in the private apartment of Mihály Mokossinyi (1815–1870) at 50 Alsó-Dunasor Street in Pest [4].‡ Similar societies had been founded in many cities across Europe from the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Royal Society of Physicians in Budapest was thus following an international trend, despite the quite different civic circumstances in Hungary [5]. Permission from imperial Habsburg was slow to come, however; and the license and regulations for the society were not endorsed by the Council of the Governor-General until 1842 [6]. Márton Szuhány (1792–1841), a physician with an active practice, was elected as the first president of the society. The fee for members was high (12 forints per year, roughly equivalent to $600 today, to be paid in monthly installments), but physicians were generally well-to-do.§

* After the Habsburg conquest of the country in the seventeenth century, Hungarians were not allowed to hold citizenship even in their own towns. Integration into the community of Jews, who began arriving in the country en masse especially after the second division of Poland (1793), was hampered by still other local orders.

† The name is particularly interesting, because the towns were not officially united until 1873 and called Budapest only from then on. The text engraved on the seal of the society, still seen in those of the society's books now owned by the Semmelweis Medical History Museum, Library, and Archives, was abbreviated to *Societas Medicor. Pestiens. et Budens.*

‡ The founding physicians were Frigyes Eckstein, Márton Szuhány, Antal Jankovich, József Cziegler, Kristóf Christen, Illés Frankl, Fülöp Gross, Antal Jacobovich, Fülöp Jacobovich, Mihály Mokossinyi, János Piskovich, János Rechnitz, Zsigmond Saphir, János Schmidt, Ferenc Szkall, and Zsigmond Tessényi. Practicing physicians as well as academics (university teachers), Hungarians and Germans, Christians and Jews, all participated in founding the society.

§ One forint in the 1830s would have been about the weekly income of a Hungarian worker at the time.

According to the founding document, the society saw as its primary (and politically innocent) tasks ''the cultivation of science and collegiality, and postgraduate education'' of the members [7]. To fulfill these aims, lectures of excellent quality were held at least six times a year [9]. (The language of the first session was Latin. From 1842 to 1849, meetings were conducted in Hungarian; later it was either German or Hungarian, but from 1861 exclusively Hungarian [8]. Most of the society's members were native speakers of German. A sizeable German minority lived in Hungary [in fact up to 1946], especially in Budapest, effectively a German-speaking city at the time. For the majority of urban dwellers and the intelligentsia, German was the mother tongue.)

The Medical Faculty of the University of Pest had established a medical library already in 1828, but the new society undertook to organize a library of its own by subscribing to some periodicals, almost all in German: *Analecten der Chirurgie von Blasius, Analecten der Frauenkrankheiten, Analecten der Kinderkrankheiten von Riecke, Analecten der specialen Pathologie und Therapie, Bibliothek Medicinischer Vorlesungen des Auslandes, Blätter für Psychiatrie von Friedrich, Casper's Wochenschrift, Centralzeitung von Sachs, Gazette Médicale, Hufeland's Bibliothek, Hufeland's Journal, Jahrbücher der Staatsarzneikunde von Wildberg, Österreichische Jahrbücher von Schmidt, Sachs Medizinischer Almanach, Zeitschrift für Geburtskunde von Busch,* and *Zeitschrift für Medizin von Dieffenbach*.

Initially, the society's library consisted of those periodicals, which were ''delivered in a *theca* [box] by a female-servant to the members.'' Up until the 1880s, the society rented rooms where the lectures were held and the journals were stored, though there was no reading room. In 1855, for example, the society housed its library in the so-called Pfeffer House on Lánchíd Square, today, Roosevelt Square 2. The additional fee for library use was 30 kreuzers per quarter, approximately $15 [10]. In the first years of its existence, because of its modest size, the library did not need a librarian. Between 1839 and 1842, such duties that arose were performed by Mokossinyi, the owner of the apartment where the society was founded and where the books and periodicals were stored; he also served as treasurer.

Official reports of the society were usually published in the *Orvosi Tár* (*Medical Magazine*), Hungary's first medical journal. The names of donors and the titles of books they had given were also reported there. Beginning in 1842, a head librarian was chosen (on an irregular schedule) from among the members of the executive council [10]. At the same time, the council decided that undocumented circulation of the medical periodicals would no longer be permitted. Accordingly, a *lectorium* (reading room) had to be found. Prior to that, members had simply sent the issues around to each other, with no one tracking what was where.

Crucial to the establishment of a genuine library was a donation of a Vienna-based Hungarian physician, Lajos Stessel (1794–1888). Stessel's early education had been in Vienna, where he also earned his doctor's degree. He had a flourishing practice there from 1824 to 1848. In a letter written on October 11, 1840, Stessel had informed the society that he was going to offer his private library of 1,500 volumes to the society ''as a foundation stone for the future library.'' (Apparently prior to that time, the society's modest collection was not regarded as a library [11].) Moreover, Stessel offered to pay for what amounted to ''postage and handling'' as well. Two years later, in November 1842, he more than kept his promise: Some 2,500 medical books and medical rarities were transported to Pest. Not done with his beneficence, Stessel also gave an endowment of 100 forints for further development of the library. In recognition of all he had done, the society elected the Viennese physician to a corresponding membership, and it was recommended that the future library be named after him [12]. (Later—all too typical in Hungary—that recommendation was apparently forgotten.)

From that point on, the society bought books aimed at keeping the collection up to date and at a genuinely professional level. The functions of the library—making acquisitions, cataloguing the holdings, maintaining a system for charging books out, and keeping track of who had which books—were overseen by an annually chosen committee. Real attempts were made to respond to readers' needs, so every member received reports of recent acquisitions [13].** To keep tabs on the books, the society initially used a simple card catalog organized by author's name. A subject catalog was kept only in a large folio volume that contained a record of library acquisitions. Some of the volumes purchased at that time are among those that make the Semmelweis Library today a medical history library.

THE APOGEE (1870–1918)

The first professionally useful regulations for the library were written by Lajos Fehér (?–1905) in the 1870s. An early version of a catalog was also being used at the end of the 1870s, but a dependable record of changes in the holdings, acquisitions, donations, and bequests—compiled by Lajos Török (1863–1945)—was first published only in 1898 [14]. Török's catalog comprised a wide-ranging list of fifteen categories, as follows:

** The yearbooks of the society had two different names: From 1874 to 1881, they bore the title, *A Budapesti Királyi Orvosegylet Évkönyve;* from 1881 to 1930, it was *A Budapesti Királyi Orvosegyesület Évkönyve.* These yearbooks were published without interruption from 1874 to 1930. The society published another periodical as well between 1912 and 1919, the *Budapesti Királyi Orvosegyesület Értesítője (Newsletter of the Royal Society of Physicians in Budapest).* This periodical contained nothing but programs of meetings and case reports. Later, the society also published two German periodicals, *Verhandlungen der Budapester Königlichen Gesellschaft der Ärzte* (1908–1911) and *Verhandlungen der Ungarischen Ärztlichen Gesellschaften* (1929–1937), strictly to facilitate international connections and exchanges.

A. Zoology, Botany, Mineralogy
B. Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Chemistry
C. Anatomy, Physiology
D. General Pathology and Therapy, Medical Chemistry, Pathology
E. Pharmacology, Mineral Waters
F. Special Pathology and Therapy, Psychiatry, Dermatology, Venereology
G. Surgery, Otology, Dentistry, Laryngology
H. Obstetrics, Gynecology, Pediatrics
I. Ophthalmology
J. Forensic Medicine, Medical Policy, Medical Statistics, Hygiene
K. Veterinary Medicine
L. Medical History
M. Varia (Paleopathology, Physicotherapy, Medical Climatology, First-aid, Emergency Medicine, etc.)
N. Journals and Periodical Works (Yearbooks, Annual Reports, etc.)
O. Balneology, Medical Topography

The subject catalog was revised steadily from the 1870s. Subdivisions were inserted, and the overall system was refined. Nonetheless, the original system remained basically intact in 1897. Török's important contribution was to get it published. From 1889 on, off-prints and reprints had their own catalog. They were, and today still are, listed and stored separately.

Bequests and exchanges or trades with other libraries and medical associations played an important role in acquisitions. In 1865, for example, the library inherited 1,100 volumes following the tragic death of Nepomuk János Tóth (1833–1865), a hospital physician who died of typhus that he contracted in the course of practicing his profession. In 1882, the eminent ophthalmologist Ignác Hirschler (1823–1891) donated 647 works in ophthalmology. In 1904, János Bókay the younger (1858–1937) offered the library 290 works in pediatrics. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the internationally renowned professor of physiology and pathology, Endre Hőgyes (1847–1906), was instrumental in establishing contacts abroad. Many of these connections led to exchanges of books and other library materials. Among the donors were not only private persons, but institutions as well, such as the Ministry of Culture, the Society for Natural Sciences, the *Gesellschaft für Natur- und Heilkunde* (Society for Science and Medicine) in Dresden, and the editorial board of the local liberal medical journal *Gyógyászat (Medicine*).

At the beginning of his tenure, Rezső Temesváry (1864–1944)—professor of gynecology and obstetrics and head of the library from 1898 to his death, forty-six years later—undertook the task of overhauling and organizing the registry of acquisitions and donations. Temesváry was also able to announce that the New York Academy of Medicine (NYAM) had paid for a reference service offered by the society's library. Reports on recently published Hungarian and Austrian medical literature, including summaries in English or French written by the members of the society, were sent to New York from the library. In exchange, the NYAM added the library to its list of corresponding institutions. As a consequence, several American medical societies began sending their publications to the Library of the Royal Society of Physicians in Budapest [15]. By 1910, the library had reciprocal trade arrangements with sixty hospitals, societies, associations, and universities across the world, from Leiden and Königsberg to Cairo and Bombay [16]. Successful activity of this sort on the part of the librarians increased the number of the books in the library to more than thirty thousand by 1914 [17].

From the beginning of the twentieth century especially, the library attempted to buy not only current publications in medical science, but also books of historical value. The gradual shift from a primarily medical reference library to a medical history library thus took place just as the library was beginning to come of age. Acquisitions of historical interest included dissertations, manuscripts, rarities of various sorts, and medical *Hungarica* (items with some direct tie to Hungary).†† The library's collection by this time contained hundreds of books and manuscripts that dated from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century; among them were works of Gesnerus, Mercurialis, Montagnana, Ryff, Leonicenus, Gersdorff, and the Bartholins (grandfather and grandson). In the library's 1905 report, it was announced with a certain pride that ''There are only a few important medical books published all over the world of which we do not have an example …. We specially focus on reference books on the most recent development of sciences, atlases, and summaries of modern professional literature'' [18]. Again, the mixture of medical and medical historical could be seen in both policy and holdings. The same report, on the other hand, proposed that acquisitions in the future should be harmonized with those of the university library and of the libraries of the individual faculties sharing fields of interests with them [18]. Perhaps the realization was beginning to develop that no one library could do it all.

Most of the books and periodicals in the library were in German, a reflection of the continued dominance of German culture in Hungary. German was the one foreign language nearly every Hungarian doctor could read. Even so, in addition to the invaluable *Index Medicus*, the most important French, English, and Italian periodicals were also available, such as *Progrés Médicale*, *The Lancet*, *Medical News*, *Medical Times*, and *Annali Italiani di Medicina Legale*. In 1892, more than ninety different periodicals were arriving at the library on a regular basis.

†† For example, Ionannes Sambucus's works count as medical *Hungarica* because he was Hungarian. The letters of Manardus belong to the *Hungarica,* because he was the physician to the Hungarian King Lajos II. Medical dissertations were included in the *Hungarica* if they were written by Hungarians abroad or written in Hungarian universities. These latter were sometimes in Hungarian, but often in German or Latin.

Situating the library in a member's apartment or in rented rooms was not very satisfactory. The repeated need to move finally ended in 1891, when the society bought a brand new, three-story house at Szentkirályi Street 21, close to the university in Pest, though this hardly solved all the society's library problems. At times, the collection was scattered in as many as eleven different rooms and repositories; sometimes even the most valuable books were simply piled in the corridors [19]. At last, in 1903, space on the second floor was given over to the library. Reference books—dictionaries, encyclopedias, bibliographies, and textbooks—were available for everyday use by readers without assistance from the librarian. Having a proper library reading room also facilitated the regulation of hours and rules of use. Although officially the library could be used only by members of the society—probably numbering around five hundred at the time (no membership lists have been found prior to the end of the century)—hours and rules alike frequently needed to be revised. In 1879, for example, the library was open daily between noon and 2:00 p.m. or between 5:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. [20]. Later, these hours applied to Sundays, too.

The greatest challenge was keeping track of the books. By 1893, it had become apparent that nonmembers were still gaining access to the library. There was more evidence of books being maltreated and even of treasured volumes disappearing [21]. Vigorous attempts were made to hinder theft and vandalism, but in 1896, fifty volumes were missing and the number of books and periodicals with pages torn out or other damage was distressingly high. An executive council order strictly excluding nonmembers from the library availed little, however: A few words of recommendation from a professor sufficed for the rules to be broken.

In 1905, a museum for the history of medicine was also established by the society on the third floor of the Szentkirályi Street building. Only four years later, in 1909, did the museum open its doors to the public [22].‡‡ The ad hoc collection contained both sentimental (or curious) and valuable items, including instruments or objects that had belonged to famous members of the society, such as the stethoscope of Frigyes Korányi (1828–1913) and a briefcase used by Ignác Semmelweis (1818–1865). Documents from Hungary's medical past, such as maps of *cordon sanitaires* from 1830 and a copy of the order that established the first Hungarian medical university, were also included. The collection improved in both the number and quality of artifacts, and in 1923, it was loaned by the society to the Museum for Public Health, then being formed. This part of the collection was unfortunately totally annihilated during the final year of World War II.§§

The librarians of the society originally worked gratis, considering the job a hobby, yet each in turn made important contributions. After Mokossinyi, the first to take on the job was Xavér Ferenc Grósz (1812–1868). Importantly, the excellent morphologist Lajos Thanhoffer (1843–1909) helped further organize the library. The original card catalog was created and handwritten by Imre Réczey (1848–1913), a renowned surgeon of his day. The periodicals as well as the offprints and reprints were catalogued by Gyula Donáth (1849–1944), professor of neurology and founder of the international journal *Epilepsy* (still published today). Temesváry, as mentioned earlier, had the longest tenure, heading the library for more than forty-five years. He provided a comprehensive catalog for dissertations and collated a valuable historical bibliography for gynecology as well.*** Repeated efforts by the society to borrow money so that they could afford a full-time librarian were unsuccessful, however. Not until 1951 were professional librarians hired to work in the library.

The fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Royal Society of Physicians in Budapest in 1887 opened a new era in the life of the society. Among other things, from the 1890s on, several specialty sections were organized under the umbrella of the society. In 1896, it was gynecology, neurology, and stomatology, and in 1899, otology, dermatology, and urology. Then, as the new century opened, it was surgery in 1902 and laryngology in 1905. These subsections of the society were deemed necessary partly because the membership had increased dramatically: By the end of the century, it exceeded one thousand. The growth and proliferation of specialty sections had an impact on the activity of the library as well [23].

THE DECLINE (1919–1950)

The apogee of the library of the Royal Society of Physicians, a period of growth and increasing professionalization, was ended by World War I. Not only was Hungary on the losing side, but, in the aftermath, it also lost two-thirds of its territory and half of its population. In 1919, a Communist revolution crippled the life of the Royal Society of Physicians (as of society in general). All publications were shut

‡‡ The first object for the museum was donated in 1842 by Frigyes Eckstein, ''a skull of a murderer.'' Eckstein proposed examining it according to the phrenological theories of F. J. Gall. The collection contained a number of interesting objects, such as a coin that had wandered for six weeks through the intestines of a man, a stone vomited by a woman, and a recently invented bandage for broken bones.

§§ The collection was later enriched by items from the Budapest Volunteer First-Aid Association founded by Géza Kresz in 1910 and by the collection of the Public Health Museum, established in 1931. In World War II, during the siege of Budapest, these collections were severely damaged. Some artifacts from the Hungarian Pharmaceutical Society's collection were stored in a simple cellar, while the more valuable objects were transported to the ''bomb-safe'' air-raid shelter of the National Museum or of the National Museum for Applied Arts, and thus mostly escaped.

*** The list of the head librarians and the years they served is: Mihály Mokossinyi, 1839–1842; Xavér Ferenc Grosz, 1842–1868; József Verebély, 1868–1874; Lajos Thanhoffer, 1874–1875; Imre Réczey, 1875–1877; Lajos Fehér, 1877–1888; Gyula Donáth, 1888–1894; Lajos Török, 1894–1898; and Rezső Temesváry, 1898–1944.

down; some never recovered. Not until ten months after the collapse of the revolutionary government did the society begin to revive. At a session on May 20, 1920, the executive council removed twenty-one members from the rolls on political grounds. Other members had died, emigrated, or voluntarily left the society [24].

The drop in membership fees meant the society faced severe economic problems. Total collapse seemed imminent but was staved off in 1923, thanks to aid from individual members and a donation from the Association of Savings Institutions and Banks. Eventually, the society received a sum of 300,000 crowns, mostly from the banking association, with which to manage the library [25]. Despite the political chaos and financial difficulties, the society—ably presided over in succession by János Bókay (1920–1924), Kálmán Buday (1924–1926), Sándor Korányi (1926–1930), István Tóth (1930–1934), and Tibor Verebély (1934–1940)—survived the period between the wars. Funds to continue managing the society and its library came from a variety of sources. Thanks to bequests from physician members Vilmos Vajna and Lajos Thegze, donations from pharmaceutical firms (especially Richter Rt.), and higher membership fees, the library managed to continue functioning without interruption during the interwar period.††† It remained on the second floor of the Szentkirályi Street building and was again open—in principle—exclusively for members. The society during this period had 960 Hungarian and 150 corresponding members [26]. Continuing economic challenges meant the library collection increased only modestly, however. During that stretch of 25 years, total acquisitions, including periodicals, amounted to only about 5,000 or 6,000 items.

From December 1944 to February 1945, the siege of Budapest (the Russians pitted against the Germans' desperate ''last stand'') took a terrible toll. The citywide destruction was staggering [27]. The society's book collection somehow survived bombings and ravaging, but, with the building itself unguarded for months, hundreds of valuable books disappeared—stolen from the collection by private individuals in the confusion that reigned following the war's end. For many years, the library was basically out of commission, largely because the society's membership was severely diminished, as a result of deaths, murders, emigration, imprisonment, and general dispersion across the country.

After the Communist takeover in 1948, the old system of civic institutions simply collapsed under the weight of the Communist government's forced appropriations. These actions, tantamount to legal robbery, effectively put all scientific and professional organizations out of business. In particular, a government order prohibited any further activity in medical associations. Members were forced to join the ironically named ''Free Union of Health Workers.'' Tracing or locating the property of disbanded or banned societies was virtually impossible, because, for the most part, those societies simply disappeared without a trace. The Communist laws included no measures to protect the property of such groups. Sometimes their possessions were absorbed into the collections of state museums, archives, and libraries. In most instances, acquired collections were used by ''successor'' organizations without any acknowledgement of their provenance, or they were sold or destroyed.

Beginning in the summer of 1945, the Free Union of Health Workers took over space in the society's Szentkirályi Street building, though the society itself technically existed until 1947. Then, once it had been officially closed down (i.e., banned), the Communist-run Free Union of Health Workers no longer made a pretense of wanting the society's building and moved to larger, more elegant quarters, still in Pest, at Nádor Street 32, in 1948. Two years later, the building in Szentkirályi Street was ''socialized,'' claimed by the Communist government for its own use (in this case, for the Soviet Medical Documentation Center). The whole collection, the archives and the library that had belonged to the former Royal Society of Physicians, was abruptly deemed ''unnecessary.'' The society and its library, for all intents and purposes, ceased to exist.

NEW LIFE FOR AN OLD LIBRARY (1951–)

The Ministry of Health in 1951 nonetheless produced a report on the collection and attempted to find it an appropriate home. On May 1 of that year, a new library—*Országos Orvostörténeti Könyvtár* (National Library for Medical History)—was founded. A veritable sleight of hand did the trick: Ownership of the books, archival materials, and periodicals that had constituted the Library of the Royal Society of Physicians was transferred to the new entity. Ákos Palla (1903–1967) was appointed director. Bureaucratic maneuvering took time, but on September 27, 1952, more than a year after its ''founding,'' the new-old library opened.

At that stage, the library was little more than a collection of materials stored in a cramped room in the former Hospital of the Brothers of Pity. Finally, on February 1, 1956, the collection was moved to its present location at Török Street 12, in Buda's Second District. By the time the library opened there, the number of volumes, including periodicals and *separata* (off-prints and reprints), had grown to some fifty thousand.‡‡‡ The designation of the library as a ''national library'' meant that this valuable collection was declared public and open to anyone presenting a reasonable *bona fide*.

††† The yearly fee was 240 pengős, or about $920. Considerable anecdotal evidence exists to support the view that such a sum would have been equivalent to the monthly income of a mid-career clerk.

‡‡‡ The original library of the Royal Society of Physicians was enriched in 1951–1952 by books from the former library of the Hospital of the Brothers of Pity and by some books of historical value from other hospital and clinic libraries.

In 1964, in a step designed to help put the library on the map internationally, it was renamed. The decision was made, perhaps understandably (if somewhat sentimentally), to name the library for the Hungarian physician whose moniker is most widely recognized abroad: Ignác Semmelweis, the man generally credited with correctly establishing the etiology and proper prophylaxis of puerperal fever. It helped that this coincided with the establishment of the Semmelweis Medical History Museum in the house where he was born, and in 1968, the two institutions merged administratively. With the formal creation of an archive, an umbrella organization—*Semmelweis Orvostörténeti Múzeum, Könyvtár és Levéltár* (Semmelweis Medical History Museum, Library, and Archive)—came into being.

Over the past twenty years, the number of volumes has increased annually by roughly a thousand, thanks primarily to bequests, donations, and trades. Miscellaneous ad hoc acquisitions sometimes add to the total. The library now comprises more than 150,000 volumes, but the core of the collection is still what was originally the Library of the Royal Society of Physicians in Budapest. Thus, has the former ''medical'' library found new life as a ''medical history'' library. Not surprisingly, most of those who frequent the library and use its collections are academics—historians of science, medical historians, university students, and retired physicians. As a national library, supported by the Hungarian government through the Ministry of Health, the Semmelweis Medical History Library is open to anyone interested in the history of human health, medical sciences, and history of science.

CONCLUSION

Despite periodic curious visitors from abroad—drawn perhaps especially to the Semmelweis Medical History Museum—the library and archive remain underutilized by the international scholarly community. Too few are aware that riches are to be found in the library beyond the materials in the admittedly daunting Hungarian language. The part of the Semmelweis Medical History Library with the greatest monetary value is the ''Collection of Rarities,'' conserved and handled separately from everything else. This collection comprises 1,093 volumes (some contain more than 1 item—booklets, pamphlets, or documents—that may have been inserted or bound into another item in the collection) that together include 1,717 publications of considerable variety. For example, the rarities collection contains 15 incunabula, 184 manuscripts (7 of which date from the fifteenth century or earlier), 808 sixteenth-century books, and more than 150 early or extremely unusual books in the *Hungarica* collection. This collection also contains books of special importance in the history of science and volumes of unique value because they contain notes or marginalia penned by previous owners. Each of the items has been catalogued with a detailed description that includes normal bibliographic data, a brief author's biography, an evaluation of the book's historical importance, and comments on the condition of the book and any illustrations. The 1,693 books published in the seventeenth century are not segregated in a separate collection, though a similar registry has been created for them. The 5,383 eighteenth-century books have only a thorough bibliographic description.

Some items in the collection are truly rare. Among the manuscripts, probably the most valuable is a fifteenth-century astrological-medical treatise in Latin (by an unknown author), followed by a German text that opens with the words ''*Kindern ist wein ain Gift*'' (For children, wine is a poison), which belongs to the genre of ''*regimina sanitatis*'' (hygiene texts). Heinrich von Pfolspeint, an eminent surgeon in the latter part of the fifteenth century, is the author of another manuscript in the collection (from 1503) of particular interest because this handwritten copy differs from other existing copies. Also to be found in the manuscript collection are lectures by Hieronymus Mercurialis and Hieronymus Capivacceus as taken down by their pupils, probably in Padua, during the sixteenth century.

Thirteen of the fifteen incunabula have medical content. Among them, the most valuable are Moses Maimonides's *Aphorismi secundum doctrinam Galeni* (*Aphorisms based on Galen's Teaching),* published in Bologna in 1489, and Hieronymus Brunschwyg's richly illustrated and beautifully hand-painted *Chirurgia (The Art of Surgery),* published in Augsburg in 1497. This latter book has been used as illustrative material in several Hungarian, French, and German publications in the history of medicine in recent decades. One of the incunabula is found in the *Hungarica* collection: *Biga salutis (The Chariot of Salvation),* written by the Minorite brother Osváth Laskai and printed in Hagenau in 1498. Though not a medical book, it does contain some text on leprosy. Given current knowledge, it appears that this is the first printed passage in Hungarian on a medical topic. (Bound into the back cover was a fragment of a sixteenth-century Hungarian poem, which was removed and is now in the collection of the Hungarian National Library.)

A number of the library's books from the sixteenth century are sufficiently rare to be especially valuable. The copy of Johannes Remmelin's *Catoptri microcosmici visio (A View of the Microcosmic Perspective)* is thought to have been published around 1610 and is one of only thirteen known copies worldwide. Even rarer, though not so old, is István Weszprémi's *Tentamen de inoculatione pestis (A Treatise on Inoculation of the Plague).* Published in London in 1755, it is one of only seven known copies in Europe. Additional sixteenth-century books of considerable value include *Das Buch des Lebens (The Book of Life)* by Marsilio Ficino, published in Strassburg in 1528; a German edition of Vesalius's *Anatomia* from 1551; *Emblemata (Emblems)* by Johannes Sambucus (a Hungarian physician and humanist), a book on symbolic pictures explained by philosophical poems, which was pub-

lished in 1554; and a 1565 edition of Galen's *Opera omnia (Complete Works).* The collection of off-prints and reprints contains some rarities as well, such as items signed by famous persons: Santiago Ramón y Cajal, Ivan Pavlov, Sudhoff, Sándor Ferenczi, and so on.

All this testifies to the fact that the collection of the Semmelweis Medical History Library contains by no means exclusively medical or pharmaceutical books. Also to be found are valuable editions in general history, history of science (especially history of biology), anthropology, religion, philosophy, natural science, or theology and texts on witchcraft, occultism, and demonology—of which most are not in Hungarian.

The vast majority of items in the collection are written in either German (35%) or Hungarian (30%). The remainder include Latin texts (15%) and English, French, and Italian (together, 10%). Nearly 3 dozen other languages, including ancient Greek, Spanish, Russian, Polish, Slovak, Serbo-Croatian, Hebrew, Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, and Sanskrit—an astonishing array—are also represented (the final 10%). This linguistic variety in the library's collection reflects the diversity in the country's political, geographic, and cultural heritage as well.

The building that houses the library serves as the regular venue for meetings of the Hungarian Society for the History of Medicine (founded in 1966) and those of the Hungarian Society for the History of Pharmacy (founded in 2005), as well as for the Editorial Board of the multilingual medical-historical journal, *Communicationes de Historia Artis Medicinae (Orvostörténeti Közlemények).* The library's mandate is to collect medical and pharmaceutical materials published prior to the 1950s.§§§ But the library also keeps up a good selection and wide variety of reference books—such as encyclopedias, maps, medical historical literature, and books of medical art—for use by researchers and readers. The building itself is also a monument from the past. A charming neobaroque villa, it was built and owned in the 1920s by an actress and singer, Ilona Kormos. In 1948, the building was simply ''socialized'' (as were most of the larger private houses), which is how it became available to house a national library.

The story of the Library of the Royal Society of Physicians in Budapest and how it evolved into the Semmelweis Medical History Library today is in numerous ways tightly entwined with Hungarian history. How could it have been otherwise? Its rise, apogee, and decline, to say nothing of its (fortunately temporary) ''socialization,'' all mirror the events and circumstances of the world around it. In its microcosm, the macrocosm is revealed. ''*Habent sua fata libelli,*'' Terentianus Maurus said in the second century C.E., and we can add that libraries also have their fate: *Habent sua fata et bibliothecae*! Especially if they are Hungarian.****

§§§ The library's book catalog can be searched on the Internet, from the home page of the Semmelweis Medical History Museum, Library, and Archives <http://www.sziren.com/sziren_0111.htm>.

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**** The collections of the Semmelweis Medical History Museum, Library, and Archives include objects and written materials from the period prior to 1950. Modern medical objects are not yet collected in a systematic way in Hungary, although there are some smaller collections (e.g., the ''Cellar Hospital Museum'' in Buda and the anatomical collection in Debrecen). On the other hand, recent medical books, periodicals, electronic records, and manuscripts have been systematically collected during the past century by the Medical Library of Semmelweis University. This collection, at least theoretically, contains all the medical books and periodicals published in Hungary in this period and, even more theoretically, all the important material published abroad during the past fifty years. Thus, the two libraries in principle complement each other.

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AUTHORS' AFFILIATIONS

Katalin Kapronczay, PhD, kapronczaykatalin@semmelweis.museum.hu, Head Librarian; **László András Magyar, UnivD,** magyarlaszlo@chello.hu, Deputy Director, Semmelweis Orvostörténeti Múzeum, Könyvtár és Levéltár; Semmelweis Orvostörténeti Könyvtár, H-Budapest, 1023 Török utca 12, Hungary; **Constance E. Putnam, PhD** (corresponding author), cputconcord@hotmail.com, Independent Scholar, Medical History/Ethics/Education, 111 Hayward Mill Road, Concord MA 01742

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